

Post-Event Summary Report

Name of Event: Oklahoma White House Conference on Aging Event in conjunction with the Oklahoma State Conference on Aging

Date of Event: May 4-6, 2005

Location of Event: Reed Conference Center, Midwest City, OK

Number of Persons Attending: 600

Sponsoring Organizations: Aging Services Division of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Major sponsors were Oklahoma AARP; Oklahoma State Council on Aging; Oklahoma Association of Area Agencies on Aging; Pfizer; Johnson & Johnson; National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare; Allergan Inc.

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Priority Issue #1: Medicare

The cost of prescription drugs is rising more quickly than the cost of any other aspect of the country's health care system; and prescription drug costs have a direct affect on Medicare and Medicaid programs serving the elderly and the needy.

The financial strains of high-cost prescription drugs on state Medicaid programs force the states to impose higher costs to taxpayers or reduce benefits and eligibility to those in need.

Barriers:

- Cost
- Little guidance is available to consumers and physicians to help purchase prescription drugs that work while keeping the cost down.
- Information released regarding changes on Medicare is confusing, contradictory and incomplete.

Proposed Solutions:

- Strongly support any and all measures ensuring the long-term solvency of Medicare.
- Strongly support any and all measures ensuring that all Americans have access to affordable prescription drugs.

Additional Issues from the Floor - Medicare

- Increase end-of-life care - hospice.
- Eliminate budget cuts affecting aging services.
- Add HIV/AIDS and co-infections Hepatitis C and TB to chronic disease list for elderly people..
- Add wellness to Medicare services.
- Expand mental health and substance abuse services for elderly.

Priority Issue #2: Supportive Services

According to the 2000 Census, one in five Americans have some level of disability; requiring long-term services and supportive services. and most long-term services and supports are provided in home and community settings by family members or other unpaid informal supports.

Long term services and supports are uncoordinated, fragmented and confusing, and many elderly, their families, and even professionals do not know about many of the types of services that exist. Publicly financed delivery systems should respond to individuals' preferences about where they receive services and supports. There is a need for more case management to assist seniors in assessing needs, linking with services and managing the services over time.

Many older adults may experience a shrinking social network or lack the social confidence to become engaged in new activities.

Many health and social services, as well as programs and systems, are not culturally and linguistically appropriate, resulting in unmet needs of minority and rural populations

Barriers:

- Apparent lack of understanding about the needs of the elderly in rural communities and the needs of the elderly of different cultures.

Proposed Solutions:

- The reduction of racial and ethnic health disparities and striving for 100 percent access to health and social services.
- The development of services and systems promoting wellness and socialization across the life-span with a non-fragmented, comprehensive approach.
- Increasing the linkage between rural communities, other community resources, academic institutions, federal programs, government-sponsored service programs and military facilities.

- Continuation and expansion of the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver program and added subsidies for services that support aging in place.
- Addressing service access and awareness including focal points in local communities where citizens can obtain accurate information on services and programs, cross marketing of services to enhance coordination and eliminate duplications, and public relations campaigns to build awareness of the various types of supportive services available.

Priority Issue #3: Caregiver Needs

One of the most critical issues facing society today is family caregiving and the destructive impact it can have on families thrust into the role as caregivers. A 2003 National Family Caregivers Association report states that 27.2 million Americans provide unpaid help, or arranged help, for an aging relative or friend with an illness or disability that leaves them unable to cope with day-to-day activities.

The continued provision of care by these unpaid informal caregivers is dependent upon their ability to maintain their own physical and mental well-being. Regular and reliable respite for caregivers can reduce burnout experienced by some caregivers.

A major issue in the delivery of respite services is that many people do not use these services, use small amounts of respite or use them for only a short period of time. For many users, respite appears to be a last stop on the road to placement.

Barriers:

- Unnecessarily burdensome bureaucratic rules for assigning families a respite worker, for settling service delivery time problems, and for determining financial assistance.
- Under-funding of respite programs.

Proposed Solutions:

- Development of new, user-friendly models of respite services.
- Identifying ways to increase utilization of respite services by caregivers.
- Significantly increasing respite funding which provides for the growing number of caregivers.

Additional Issues from the Floor

- Increased funding for Foster Grandparent and Grandparent and Kinship Care programs

Priority Issue #4: Physical Health and Wellness

More than 2/3 of older adults do not engage in any regular physical activity; and older adults have lost as much as 40% of their muscle strength by age 80 with much of this strength loss attributable to sedentary lifestyle.

Studies have shown that physical activity can help treat the pain and prevent disability associated with arthritis.

Heart disease is the leading killer among older adults in the US, and physical activity has important benefits for the prevention and treatment of heart disease and heart failure.

Studies have shown physical activity to have significant positive effects on persons with dementia in functional performance, behavioral symptoms and cognitive function.

Those persons who can benefit the *most* from physical activity are the *most* sedentary, and, it is NEVER too late to begin a program of physical activity to reap health benefits.

Barriers:

- A misunderstanding of the importance of physical activity.
- Needed counseling and educating of the elderly to increase physical activity.

Proposed Solutions:

- Developing programs linking older adults with community sources promoting physical activity for healthy aging.
- Educating physicians to take a more active role in prescribing physical activity for their older adult patients.
- Educating older adults to undertake more physically active lifestyles to avoid premature disability.

Priority Issue #5: Baby Boomer Issues

As the number of Americans over the age of 65 increases there will be many effects on our society. These effects will influence business, government, families, health care, and retirement, among others. How we plan for and deal with these issues will be very important for the well-being of older Americans and their families.

When we consider the number of older Americans in our country geographic distribution can have a tremendous influence on the need for services. We find some regions of America with few older citizens, but others, with extremely high concentrations. These regions will develop specialized conditions that require national,

state, and local, governments to plan together in order to meet the needs of large concentrations of older citizens.

In areas of high concentration the key issues that need to be planned for include, adequate income, housing, transportation, medical services, safety, nutrition, social contact, and long term care. Each region of the country will be required to meet the needs of its older citizens, with all of the individual differences inherent in place and sub-culture.

The key process by which our national, state, and local governments can prepare for large numbers of older citizens is by supporting education and training in aging related occupations. This means providing additional resources to educational institutions at all levels, including vocational, associate, four year colleges, universities, and professional schools, that train workers for the aging industry. Increasing educational resources will help place people with the right education and training into positions that will meet the needs of a growing older population.

Barriers:

- Providing sufficient funding for educational institutions at all levels.

Proposed Solutions:

- Increased emphasis and support to expand training programs in Gerontology and Geriatrics at all levels of education, in order to meet the growing needs of an aging society.

Additional Issues from the Floor

- Increase senior employment opportunities
- Provide for delivery of care in long term care settings.